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State Gap Analysis

This section presents information gathered through stakeholder surveys and interviews with more than 100 emergency responders from throughout the State. The information was collected between May and December 2005. The stakeholders represent police, fire, EMS, hazmat, emergency communications, emergency management, public works, public health, health care, security, and volunteer organizations. They work for public and private sector agencies, as well as, state and local governments. They serve different parts of the State and are employed by large, small, and volunteer departments. The stakeholders also have a range of experience and present front line, mid-management, and executive level perspectives.

This gap analysis was designed to evaluate how training can better meet the needs of the State's emergency responders. It considers training gaps that exist within and between disciplines, statewide training standards and credentialing, best practices for providing training, and barriers to successful training.

The responses to the gap analysis are summarized below, following each specific interview/survey question. When useful to the discussion, other related surveys results are referenced.

Does your department have the right training, right now, to respond to a major disaster or terrorism incident?

“We’re fully trained for our typical missions, but a major incident, I’m not certain.”

Most stakeholders are confident in their organization's ability to do perform during emergencies and disasters, including terrorism incidents. However, there is a pervasive lack of confidence in their ability to perform during large-scale incidents that require them to work within an overarching response system that includes other disciplines and jurisdictions. This stems primarily from their lack of understanding about other disciplines' roles and responsibilities and apprehension about how they fit in and what is expected from them.

Many stakeholders expressed concern about the level of training achieved by other organizations and disciplines that will respond as part of a large-scale response. Uncertainties were commonly raised about the competence of other agencies from home jurisdictions, different areas of the State, and “fringe” or supporting disciplines.

Several expressed concern that others do not believe terrorism is a significant risk, do not realize the urgency to train, and/or do not think that they will have a significant role during a terrorism incident.

Disciplines that expressed the most confidence in their level of training are front line responders from hazmat and volunteers from the American Red Cross and Search and Rescue. These stakeholders repeatedly described themselves as “training all the time”, having well structured training curricula, standards, and internal certifications.

Conversely, the least confident are EMS line staff and all levels of health care personnel. These stakeholders commonly stated that they have not received sufficient training, especially in NIMS/ICS and interagency operations.

Another consistent theme was heard from emergency managers statewide. They described themselves as being comfortable with their progress and “having a good road map” for where they want to go. This may reflect the fact that one third of the State’s emergency management offices report conducting an annual training needs assessment¹ and, therefore, are able to track progress.

Finally, a common statement made by line staff was that, although not everyone is trained, those who need to be, i.e. managers and supervisors, have the right training.

Related Survey Results

In 2004, the State Emergency Management Council Task Force on Local Programs conducted a study of local-level emergency management programs. As part of their effort they obtained interview/survey responses from emergency management offices throughout the State. Respondents from counties with less than 20,000 in population, cities with less than 50,000 in population, and tribes rated their training and exercise programs as “less than effective.” Respondents from the remaining, more populated jurisdictions rated the effectiveness of their programs as “average.”

Additionally, the Task Force results show that personnel with emergency management responsibilities from less populated jurisdictions and tribes use available training to a significantly lesser extent than those from more populated jurisdictions. Similarly less populated jurisdictions and tribes exercise their emergency response plans and participate in regional exercises substantially less than more populated jurisdictions.¹

In June 2005, the Washington Emergency Management Division conducted a survey of over 40 state, local, and tribal emergency response organizations. More than 79% of the respondents stated that they would benefit from **a central organization for overseeing homeland security training statewide**. Such an

organization would be responsible for identifying and filling training gaps, developing standards, and providing training resources.

Likewise, more than 80% said that they will benefit from **one statewide source for training needs**. Examples of such needs included a database of qualified trainers and statewide training schedules.²

Are you confident that your department understands how to implement NIMS/ICS in conjunction with other local, state, and federal agencies?

“A few could, but we need more training.”

Most of the stakeholders are familiar with NIMS/ICS, appreciate its importance, and expressed a need for more training within their organization. The level of NIMS/ICS training achieved varied from “none” to “completely trained” regardless of discipline, geography, population, and size of agency. In the majority of cases, management level personnel had received some training, but field staff had received little or no training.

Some stakeholders said that, although they had received some initial NIMS/ICS training, they need refresher training to remain current. Stakeholders, who described themselves as well along the way to being completely trained on NIMS/ICS, see it as a weakness elsewhere.

The 2004 survey of emergency management personnel conducted by the Washington State Emergency Management Council Task Force on Local Programs reported that 68% of the respondents from counties, 51% from cities, and 14% from tribes are trained in their jurisdiction’s incident command or management system.¹

A 2005 survey of Citizen Corps volunteers conducted by the Washington Citizen Corps Council reported that 82% of the respondents have taken ICS or NIMS training. The most common courses completed were IS700 (49%) and IS100 (38%).³

What training does your department lack that would help you to respond more effectively to a major disaster or terrorism incident?

“People don’t know what others’ roles are in an emergency, disciplines work in vacuums, with little cross training”.

Overwhelmingly, the most-common-training need identified by the stakeholders is training to better understand the roles and responsibilities of other disciplines,

followed by interagency, cross jurisdictional training. Police and fire typically described the latter need in the form of exercises.

Hazmat and terrorism awareness are a common need for respondents from emergency communications, EMS, and volunteer agencies, including volunteer fire.

On the other hand, advanced-level terrorism courses are needed by representatives from emergency management, public health, law enforcement, public works, and the private sector.

Routine and/or mass decontamination methods were identified consistently by EMS and NIMS/ICS by almost all health care respondents.

Hands-on equipment training was commonly identified by front line staff, as well as stakeholders from hazmat, emergency management, and health care.

Generally, more awareness-level training is needed in Western Washington. Stakeholders in Eastern Washington expressed a greater need for specialized and scenario-based training.

Front line staff was more likely to identify hands-on equipment and awareness-level training whereas mid and upper level staff expressed a greater need for refresher, incident management, and scenario training.

Other identified training topics include interoperable communications, risk assessment, cyber security, understanding and detecting CBRNE agents, mass fatality management, community involvement/mobilization, communication and cultural skills, and critical incident stress management. Suggested scenarios include transit system response, radiological emergencies, bioterrorism, mass evacuation and sheltering, and large-scale hazmat incidents.

Do you think that all-hazards or terrorism awareness-level training should be mandatory?

“We need a high percentage of participation for the training to have an impact.”

Although the majority of stakeholders agreed with mandating awareness-level training, most placed contingencies on it.

Those favoring a mandate believe that it is the only way to achieve statewide awareness-level training within all departments and disciplines. They think that the risk to responding personnel and the public justifies a mandate.

Stakeholders from the primary response disciplines (police, fire, hazmat, and EMS) and front line staff most strongly supported the mandate.

Those not in favor typically stated that mandates lead to resistance and awareness-level training should be recommended only. Some believe that it is better to encourage training through associated funding. Volunteers voiced a consistent concern that too many restrictions will reduce their staffing.

Many stakeholders expressed concern that the mandate should only apply to a percentage or specific levels of management within an organization. Similarly, many stated that mandated training must not be a hardship. It must be well funded and easily obtainable.

Do you think that it would be beneficial to standardize all-hazards or terrorism awareness-level training statewide?

“Standardized training is the only way people who have never worked together can have a chance at success”

The vast majority of stakeholders believe statewide training standards are needed. They want a clear knowledge of the level of training attained by others within their own discipline and jurisdictions, as well as those responding through mutual aid. Even more so, they want to have confidence that disciplines they *do not* work with on a daily basis have a minimum level of training.

The stakeholders believe that standards will allow responders who have never worked together to succeed. Conversely, without standards, they anticipate that major events will suffer from wide spread interoperability issues. Almost all of the stakeholders affirmed that standards will provide responding personnel with the ability to speak the same language, share information, and take a uniform approach to problems.

Many stakeholders do not believe that small or volunteer departments or supporting disciplines will achieve the level of readiness they need without standards. Several stakeholders from small, rural agencies expressed support for standards only if they are contingent on not using a “one size fits all” approach, but take into account an organization’s level of resources, funding, and size.

Other suggestions include making the statewide awareness-level training standards practical, achievable, part of the first responder culture, attainable without hardship, associated with funding, and applicable to the appropriate level of personnel. Additionally, the statewide standards should recognize, support, and be compatible with standards already under development by regions, jurisdictions, organizations, and disciplines.

Related Survey Results

During the 2005 Washington Emergency Management Division survey, emergency responders affirmed that ICS, NIMS, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Personal Protective Equipment, Mass Decontamination, and Operational Security and Safety courses are important components of awareness-level training.²

Do you think credentialing is needed/beneficial?

“Even in small scale- mutual aid situations we have interoperability issues, a major event would result in a Tower of Babble.”

Most of the stakeholders support a statewide credential that will allow on-scene managers to authenticate identity and level of training. Their primary reasons are to improve safety, logistics, and interoperability during major events involving mutual aid.

The stakeholders strongly expressed that their safety depends on the competence of others on-scene. Everyone should be able to prove their level of training. “Even the knowledge that others have achieved a basic standard of training helps keep everyone alive.”

The stakeholders also stated that credentialing will reduce confusion and enable on-scene managers to deploy incoming personnel more effectively and efficiently. In addition, credentialing meets federal guidelines for NIMS compliance.

Finally, the stakeholders affirm that credentialing realizes the benefits of standards. It ensures that everyone on-scene is “on the same page”, speaks a common language, and knows consistent procedures, protocols, and how to share information with one another.

Those Stakeholders, who are skeptical about a statewide credential, and who are reluctant to have the State step-in, expressed concern about bureaucratic requirements, and/or believe credentialing should be provided through a given organization or discipline only.

What modes of training best suit your department?

“Small agencies have limited budgets and resources. Training programs need to recognize and accommodate that.”

For all disciplines, instructor-led classroom training is the most common form of training delivery. This is especially true for fire, hazmat, law enforcement, public works, and volunteer organizations. Other forms of training delivery, including online training, CDs, DVDs, videos, video-conferencing, and satellite downlink conferencing are pursued most extensively by emergency communications, health care, EMS and private sector personnel.

Although the stakeholders are most familiar with classroom training, almost all of them are willing or actively taking courses online. The most common reason for favoring classroom training is that it allows face-to-face contact and networking. Conversely, online training is preferred for its flexible scheduling, high level of information, ability to work at own pace, low cost, and lack of required travel. Stakeholders also appreciate that online training courses can be updated more readily and less expensively than printed materials. Several stakeholders suggested that online training solved the problem of tired, poor quality trainers and the “same old instructor led classrooms.”

Many stakeholders said that they would be more likely to pursue online training if it were improved in terms of media. Suggested improvements include injecting stimulating technology, using video and sound, building in simulations using realistic scenarios that allow players to make choices and require judgment, and incorporating more graphics. Several stakeholders said that they are actively looking for the right online opportunities.

Related Survey Results

The June 2005 Washington Emergency Management Division survey found that 67% of the respondents were “likely” or “more likely” to attend classroom training. However, 80% stated that the value of online training is “desirable” or “highly desirable.”²

The survey conducted by the Washington Citizen Corps Council in October 2005 reported that the respondents mostly attend classroom training (79%). However, 82% have also pursued online training, most frequently, independent study (63%) and DHS/FEMA courses (42%).³

Similar views were expressed in The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice 2000 Training Needs Assessment Update for Washington State. The results of their interviews with public health personnel were summarized in the following statement, “the emphasis in future training efforts should be as much on the modality as on content...All training should make use of case-based learning, with much participant interaction, and take advantage of the many options offered by distance learning technologies to supplement direct training and teaching sessions.”⁴

During a recent nationwide law enforcement survey conducted by the Rural Crime and Justice Center, respondents overwhelmingly identified face to face training as their preferred method for training delivery. However, participants from the Pacific Northwest also recognized correspondence courses and video as popular training methods.⁵

During another nationwide survey of 100 first responders conducted in March 2004 by Peter D. Hart and Robert M. Teeter Research Firms, participants ranked the usefulness of shared training opportunities via e-learning, distance learning, and web-based learning as 4.1 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely useful.⁶

What are your suggestions for improving training materials?

“Real-life and recent examples wherever possible.”

The Stakeholders have many ideas for improving training materials. Most commonly, they expressed the need for materials to be tailored to the targeted audience and appropriate region. They desire them to incorporate real-life scenarios, case-studies, recent examples, and local images. When appropriate, they recommend that the materials include hands-on exercises and group activities. The stakeholders also recommend that training materials be configured into manageable blocks of time.

Many stakeholders expressed frustration that existing materials are put together too quickly and not kept updated. They also described existing materials as being difficult to understand. They suggested that the materials be written in easy, understandable language, “plain English”. They recommended limiting big words and eliminating acronyms. The stakeholders also suggested making the materials more user-friendly. They want to be able to identify and find learning points more easily. They also want the materials to be a better resource for studying for tests.

Other suggestions for improving training materials include making them portable and physically durable for use in the field. Some recommended laminating critical materials, others “pocket cards” containing key information in a condensed or diagrammatic format.

Is shorter, more frequent training better?

“Shorter is better, refresher training is critical”

The vast majority of stakeholders consider shorter, more frequent training, better. All stated that training should be limited to one day or less. Their most preferred amount of time is ½ - 1 day. When significant travel is required, the stakeholders

desire at least 6 hours of training. The primary reason for favoring shorter, more frequent training is that it permits regular refresher opportunities that keep training materials, as well as staff current.

What evaluation methods should be used to ensure that those taking a training course learned the material?

“Throwing the material out there and hoping for the best won’t cut it”

The stakeholders are divided on how to evaluate training experiences. Some prefer tests, while others favor drills, exercises and other performance measures. All believe that some form of evaluation is important, because it indicates if students have a grasp of the subject, holds students accountable, demonstrates knowledge, and provides feedback to instructors.

Those who prefer tests believe that tests provide better, more measurable and comparable feedback. Tests also hold students accountable for attendance, and can be completed when there are time limitations. Several stakeholders expressed the desire for pre and post testing, as well as the ability to self test. Regardless of preference, many claimed that most tests are not well designed or well written.

Those who favor drills and exercises claimed that these activities allow one to see how to do it, give opportunity for interaction with other agencies, and allow testing as a team. Other suggested evaluation methods that rely on performance were peer observation, instructor observation, and response to instructor questions.

What barriers keep you from attending training?

“Much of the best traditional training is a long way from Yakima”

Across all disciplines, the number one reason that the stakeholders are not able to attend training is that they are over tasked and do not have time. The second most common reason is lack of funding. Cost is especially challenging for law enforcement EMS, public works, and volunteer personnel. These results agree with a nationwide study during which law enforcement respondents from the Pacific Northwest indicated that cost (78%) and time (65%) are their greatest obstacles to training.⁵

A fewer number of stakeholders identified difficulty scheduling and substandard trainers/training as barriers. Private sector representatives consistently identified travel as a barrier.

Other reasons given less often include:

- Family
- Bureaucratic approval process
- Overtime issues
- Lack of organizational support
- Real world situations
- Motivation

Summary of the Gap Analysis Findings

1. Most emergency responders throughout the State have insufficient training for large-scale incidents that will require them to work within an overarching response system that includes other disciplines and jurisdictions.
2. All responders need training to better understand the roles and responsibilities of other disciplines. In addition more interagency and cross jurisdictional training is needed.
3. Most emergency responders are familiar with NIMS/ICS, appreciate its importance, and expressed a need for more training within their organization. In the majority of cases, management level personnel have received some training, but field staff has received little or no training.
4. Most responders have existing training needs with topics varying based on discipline, geography, population, size of agency, and level of personnel.
5. Statewide training accomplishments are not documented or publicized in a way that allows responders to know what training has been received by other agencies, disciplines or jurisdictions.
6. Statewide training needs and gaps are not assessed, tracked or monitored in a way that allows training to be marketed or targeted to those who need it.
7. Emergency responders need a single, centralized statewide source for training resources and information.
8. The unique training needs and barriers for rural jurisdictions, tribes, small departments, and volunteer agencies need to be addressed in order for them to achieve and maintain the requisite level of readiness.
9. The State needs to determine a minimum level of preparedness for emergency response agencies. A statewide model is needed to help agencies, jurisdictions and disciplines know what will be expected of them during large-scale events. The model may be used as a basis for identifying and prioritizing training.

10. A strategy is needed to ensure that statewide awareness-level training is achieved and maintained within all emergency response disciplines. The strategy needs to identify the awareness-level curriculum, what level or percentage of personnel it applies to, and the viability of using a mandate, funding or some other means to encourage participation.
11. Statewide training standards are needed. Responders need to be knowledgeable about the level of training attained by others and confident that disciplines they do not work with on a daily basis have a minimum level of training.
12. A statewide training credential is needed to improve safety, logistics, and interoperability during major events involving mutual aid.
13. Training needs to be provided in multiple modes in order to accommodate the range of training preferences, capabilities, and needs throughout the State and to maximize the accessibility of training to all responders.
14. Training needs to promote participant interaction, the use of judgment, and decision making.
15. Online training needs to be improved in terms of media, such as by injecting stimulating technology, using video and sound, building in simulations, and incorporating more graphics.
16. Training materials need to be better tailored to the targeted audience, incorporate real-life scenarios, case-studies, recent examples, and local images.
17. Training materials need to be more understandable, user-friendly, current, and configured into manageable blocks of time. Consideration also needs to be given to the use of training materials in the field.
18. Responders need shorter, more frequent training that permits regular refresher opportunities, which can provide a forum for current issues.
19. Training needs to be evaluated in order to substantiate that the material has been learned and to provide student and instructor feedback.
20. Tests used to evaluate training need to be better designed and written.
21. Training needs to be more accessible and achievable to those who have limited time, funding, and resources.

¹ A Study of Emergency Management at the Local Program Level, Washington State Emergency Management Council Task Force on Local Programs, September 2, 2004.

² Homeland Security Training Survey, Washington State Emergency Management Division, June 2005.

³ October 2005 Programmatic Update, Washington Citizen Corps Council, October 2005.

⁴ Workforce Development Project, 2000 Training Needs Assessment Update-Washington State, Final Report, The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, August 2000.

⁵ Nationwide Rural Area Law Enforcement Study, A Compilation and Analysis of Data, The Rural Crime and Justice Center (RCJC) of Minot State University, February 2005.

⁶ CEG First Responders Survey, Study #77192b, Peter D. Hart and Robert M. Teeter Research Firms, March 2004.

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